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SUBJECT: NEW CENTRAL AGENCY FOR INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND
E-GOVERNMENT WELCOMES USG ASSISTANCE

¶1. On 17 December, Econoff met with Director-General Ali Al-Shuraidah of the newly established Central Agency for Information Technology (CAIT). CAIT was established by the Council of Ministers in August 2006 to act as the central coordinating authority for all government IT matters to include: policy, budgeting, project evaluation, training, national programs, and promotion of the IT industry in Kuwait. Al-Shuraidah said the agency was modeled after the IDA in Singapore. Its board, which reports directly to the Minister for Cabinet Affairs, is comprised of under secretaries from the Ministries of Finance, Interior,

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Defense, Communications, Planning, and Education. The organization currently has 310 staff permanently assigned, but Shuraidah complained that a number of important functions still reside in individual ministries over which he has limited control. He added that each government agency still selects its own hardware and applications.

¶2. Shuraidah said CAIT's current priority was to finalize its four-year ICT master plan for submission to the Council of Ministers. He estimated that its cumulative four-year budget would be \$2-3 billion. Some of the principal elements included in the plan are: a national IT literacy program, a program to stimulate growth of the IT industry in Kuwait, design and construction of a "Kuwait Information Network" to include all government agencies, and the rollout of a robust e-government program. The five key components of the e-government program will be: e-services, e-payment, e-procurement, e-consulting (for government employees to communicate with international consultants), and e-participation (a forum for private citizens to discuss issues with government officials). CAIT's goal is for citizens to be able to access most government services through the e-government network via home computers, 24-hour public terminals, and mobile devices.

¶3. Shuraidah expressed interest in traveling to the U.S. to visit operational e-government sites and meet with individuals responsible for developing, launching, and maintaining e-government programs. Specifically, he was interested in sharing best practices and discussing strategies for overcoming the "Digital Divide." He would also like to review case studies of companies that have used government IT programs and policies to drive national economic growth. He cited Singapore and Costa Rica as examples. Finally, Shuraidah mentioned that he would welcome assistance with IT budgeting and the selection of relevant performance indicators.

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